The PROPAGANDA SELF-DEFENSE CHECKLIST

How to question claims, verify facts, resist manipulation, and think clearly in the age of AI.

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

#1 Question Assumptions and Authority

> **"The important thing is not to stop questioning"— Albert Einstein (1955)**

- Always ask, "Who benefits from this message?" Follow the money. Look at the funding, incentives, and agendas behind it.
- Question authority. Don't be persuaded by titles, credentials, or popular opinion alone. Ask for evidence. Consider whether the source has expertise, conflicts of interest, or bias.
- Investigate the source. Where did the idea, movement, or information originate? Who promotes it? Is it a genuine grassroots effort or a coordinated campaign?
- Look for what is missing. What facts, perspectives, or stories are being ignored? Seek out alternative viewpoints and dissenting opinions.
- Avoid false choices. When presented with an either-or decision, consider other possibilities. Ask, "What are the third, fourth, or fifth options?"

#2 Verify Facts and Seek Evidence

“Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.”
— Aldous Huxley (1927)

- Ask for evidence. Do not accept claims at face value. Look for primary sources, dates, direct quotes, data, and confirmation from multiple independent sources whenever possible.
- Pause before reacting. Messages that trigger fear, anger, or guilt can cloud judgment. Ask yourself whether the claim is based on facts or emotion.
- Test ideas critically. Challenge assumptions, ask questions, and examine evidence. Be willing to change views when new facts emerge.
- Learn from history. Study past events to recognize recurring patterns. Understanding history can help you identify manipulation and avoid repeating mistakes.
- Focus on the facts. Information overload can create confusion. Concentrate on the most important facts and revisit major claims as new evidence becomes available.

#3 Guard Against Emotional Manipulation

“To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.” — Bertrand Russell (1943)

- Separate emotion from reason. When a message creates a strong emotional reaction, restate it in neutral language. This can help reveal what is actually being said.
- Resist social pressure. A belief is not automatically true because it is popular. Consider whether you would accept the same claim if nobody else supported it.
- Focus on the argument. Evaluate ideas based on their merits, not on personal attacks, labels, or attempts to discredit individuals.
- Watch for distractions. Public attention is often directed toward side issues. Ask whether the real problem is being ignored and who benefits from the diversion.
- Remember the human element. People are more than labels or categories. Avoid dehumanizing language and consider the experiences and perspectives of others.

#4 Embrace Critical Thinking and Awareness

“The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.” — John Philpot Curran (1790)

- Think for yourself. Be aware of your own assumptions, emotions, and biases. Ask why certain ideas seem acceptable while others are discouraged or ignored.
- Seek different viewpoints. Read widely and explore perspectives that challenge your beliefs. A strong argument can withstand scrutiny from multiple angles.
- Examine how issues are framed. The way a question is presented can influence how people think about it. Consider alternative ways of looking at the same issue.
- Recognize repetition. It is the #1 propaganda tactic because familiarity can start to feel like proof. A claim does not become true because it is repeated frequently. Trace it back to evidence, dates, and original sources.
- Judge by actions and results. Do not rely on appearances, slogans, or promises. Focus on what people actually do and the outcomes they produce.

#5 Daily Practice

“If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” — George Orwell (1945)

Choose one claim from the news or social media each day and ask:

- What evidence supports this claim?
- Who benefits if people believe it?
- What information might be missing?
- Is this new information, or is old news being recycled?
- Is the wording factual, or is it designed to trigger fear, anger, or excitement?
- How would this sound if stated in neutral language?

#5 Daily Practice Continued

Use AI as a first check. Ask at least two AI tools to explain the claim, check the date, and identify possible exaggeration. AI can help you slow down, spot clickbait, find missing context, and see whether an old story is being presented as new.

For example, on X, tap 'Explain this post.' Then ask: "**How accurate is this claim, and what evidence supports it? What context may be missing? Could this be old news presented as new?**" With ChatGPT, paste the claim or post and ask the same questions.

But AI should not be the final authority. After using AI, verify important claims through primary sources, official records, original reporting, direct quotes, dates, and evidence.

The goal is not to become cynical or distrustful of everything. The goal is to think clearly, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions for yourself.

Michael W. Campbell
https://x.com/dmcorp

Further Reading

This checklist is adapted from **The Field Guide to Propaganda**: How to Spot the Lies, Expose the Agenda, and Defend Your Mind by Michael W. Campbell. **The complete ebook is free to download** from the Internet Archive and may be shared for non-commercial purposes under a Creative Commons licence. No paywall. No sign-up. No nonsense.
https://archive.org/details/propaganda-field-guide/

TL;DR version:
The Top 40 Propaganda Tactics with links to their posts:
https://x.com/dmcorp/status/1990621752284885390

Copyright © 2026 Michael Warren Campbell.
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).
You are free to copy and share this publication for non-commercial purposes, provided it is credited to the author and distributed in its original, unmodified form.

QUESTION - VERIFY - RESIST - THINK